

Audience: African Americans

CDC 2011-2012 Flu Season

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Think You're Not at Risk for the Flu? You Might be Dead Wrong

Did you know that while the flu can make anyone sick, people with long-term health conditions—such as asthma, diabetes (type 1 and 2) and heart disease—are at greater risk for serious complications from the flu? African Americans are more likely to live with the chronic diseases that are known to increase the risk of flu complications. Serious flu complications can lead to hospitalization and sometimes even death.

The good news is that you can take a simple step to protect yourself and your family from the flu by getting the flu vaccine each year. The bad news is that many African Americans are not doing this.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says a flu vaccine is the first and best way to guard against the flu. CDC recommends that everyone 6 months and older get the flu vaccine every year.

“We’ve seen an increase in the number of children getting the flu vaccine,” says Dr. Anne Schuchat, Assistant Surgeon General of the U.S. Public Health Service and CDC’s Director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. “However we are concerned that vaccine coverage rates remain low in the United States for adults, particularly in African Americans.”

So why are so few African Americans getting the flu vaccine? Some people may have concerns about vaccine safety. It is important to know, however, that flu vaccines (both the shot and nasal spray) have excellent safety records, and are constantly being monitored. The most common side effects reported after flu vaccination are minor, and are far outweighed by the vaccine’s benefits. Millions of flu vaccines have been given safely over the years, and vaccine safety remains a priority every single year.

It’s also important to know that the flu vaccine cannot give you the flu. Why? Because the flu shot contains killed viruses, and the nasal spray has weakened viruses that cannot cause illness. If you get flu-like symptoms soon after getting vaccinated, it can mean you may have been exposed to the flu before getting vaccinated, or during the two-week period it takes the body to gain protection after vaccination. It might also mean you are sick with another illness that causes symptoms similar to the flu.

Some people may think that because they received the flu vaccine last season, they don’t need another one this year. “Even though the vaccine composition is still the same this year, everyone needs to get vaccinated with this season’s vaccine because immunity from last season’s vaccine will have declined” says Schuchat. “You need to get vaccinated with this season’s vaccine to best protect against flu this season. People who do not are risking a possibly long and serious illness, as well as placing their close contacts at risk for the flu.”

Remember, the flu can be especially serious for babies, children, pregnant women, people 65 and older and people with certain long-term medical conditions. However, even healthy people can get the flu and should protect themselves by getting the flu vaccine every year.

For more information, talk to your doctor or contact CDC at 1-800-CDC-INFO or <http://www.cdc.gov/flu>.